

Germany: Italian artist Costantino Ciervo rebuffs criticism from Zionist lobbies, politicians seeking to close his exhibition

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Italian artist Costantino Ciervo has made a powerful short video for Instagram and Facebook. In the video, he denounces defamatory accusations of antisemitism that have been used to justify attempts by German politicians and lobby groups to shut down his exhibition “COMUNE – The Paradox of Similarity in the Middle East Conflict” at the Fluxus+ Museum in Potsdam (near Berlin).

The exhibition proposes a vision of Jews and Palestinians living together in a federation based on equal rights, directly contradicting claims that the work is antisemitic.

In the video Ciervo explains that: “After the opening [of the exhibition] a smear campaign was launched in Germany claiming that the exhibition was antisemitic. The smear campaign was initiated by the Commissioner for Antisemitism of the State of Brandenburg, the Israeli Embassy, the Jewish community in Potsdam, and Volker Beck, the president of the German-Israeli Society.”

Readers should note that the two leading politicians behind the smear campaign are members of nominally left organisations. The Brandenburg Commissioner for Antisemitism, Andreas Büttner, is a member of the Left Party. Volker Beck, the president of the German-Israeli Society, is a longstanding member of the Green Party.

One week after he issued his initial threat against Ciervo’s exhibition, Büttner also exerted pressure on the initiative “Potsdam for Palestine” and the Thalia cinema in Babelsberg to prevent the showing of a film, the BBC documentary *War in Gaza: Images of a Genocide*, together with a panel discussion involving a member of Doctors Without Borders.

In his own post against the Fluxus+ Museum exhibition, Beck accused Costantino of “trivializing the Holocaust through comparison” [to the Gaza genocide] and concluded by threatening legal action. “The Potsdam public prosecutor’s office is now examining this legal question.”

In response, Ciervo declared in his video:

I vehemently reject the accusation that I am an antisemite. Throughout my entire life I have always been committed to the struggle against racism and every form of oppression. I have advocated peace and coexistence among

peoples. The exhibition is not about confronting one ethnicity against another, but rather a vision that in Palestine Jews and Palestinians could live together with equal rights in peace.

Ciervo’s video, available in German and Italian, has already been seen hundreds of times, accompanied by overwhelmingly positive reactions.

The renowned South African artist and Jewish activist Candice Breitz, who herself had an exhibition of her work cancelled by the Saarlandmuseum in late 2023, following accusations of “hatred of Israel,” wrote on Instagram:

Full solidarity—It’s infuriating to see the same tactics rolled out over and over again against artists (and so many others) who understand speaking out against genocide to be the most basic gesture of human decency. I’ve yet to meet a thinking person who takes Volker Beck seriously. He is a Zionist lobbyist who is not—and never will be—an authority on antisemitism. History will look back on him and his ilk as individuals who built careers out of actively denying and/or whitewashing the violent perpetration of occupation, apartheid and ethnic cleansing.

Other comments on Instagram declare:

Dear Mr Ciervo, as a Jewish artist with German roots, I would like to express my solidarity with your project. Especially in today’s world, where this issue is of great importance, it is all the more valuable to make it visible through your art. I wholeheartedly support and share the vision you convey in your work.

Best regards from Munich.

And another:

Stay strong. Your criticism of Israeli policy is not automatically anti-Semitism. So many Jews are against Israeli policy, and they are also labelled as “self-hating Jews”, which is an absurd attempt to erase any form of criticism of Israel. Good luck and stay strong. I am sorry that you have been singled out now.

Readers of the WSWWS have also expressed their solidarity with Costantino Ciervo and his exhibition in letters addressed to the Potsdam museum.

Felix Kreisel writes:

I fully support the staging of the art exhibition “Commune—The Paradox of Similarity in the Middle East Conflict” and wish to protest your attempts to close it and equate anti-zionism with antisemitism. Semites include both Arabs and Jews, and the atrocity going on in Gaza and Palestine hurts Jews as well as Arabs.

George Gonzalez writes:

Please do not censor the current exhibition “Commune—The Paradox of Similarity in the Middle East Conflict.” While I have not seen the exhibition myself, the exhibition (as I understand it) is a thoughtful effort to explore the ethical, political currents underlying the Israel-Gaza War. It would be a clear violation of democracy to censor/suppress critical (artistic) thought — especially in a context of war.

Robert B. Livingston writes:

To whom it may concern at the Potsdam Fluxus Museum,

I have been following reports from the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei on the controversies being generated by your museum’s presentation of art works by Costantino Ciervo.

I hope you defend the artist from the prejudiced attacks being directed against him, his art, and your museum ... Costantino Ciervo is adamant that the goal of his art is to promote peaceful coexistence, brotherhood, and equality.

That such an artist with such a hope can attract so much vituperation and hate is nothing new in this world isn’t it? To choose peaceful coexistence, brotherhood, and equality is a revolutionary act on a planet where too many benighted people choose to kill, fight, and die over artificially drawn boundaries ... Ciervo’s art: humanistic and hopeful, encompasses the best artistic instincts that will long outlive the deep ignorance of those who are determined to pressure your museum. You must resist such

pressure!

Defend your artist Costantino Ciervo!

Other expressions of solidarity are featured in the book at the museum available for comments. One visitor to the exhibition writes:

When the wise person points at the moon, the fool sees only the finger. This saying came to my mind when I read about the polemics surrounding this exhibition. The artist’s idea and message, which are guided by a thought of peace, are being thoroughly misunderstood and attacked—indeed, even fought against. Shame!

Another visitor comments:

It is good and important that the freedom of art is being defended by the museum. It is of great concern that this is being questioned by the state and anti-semitism of the state government.

A third:

With his exhibition, the artist has revealed those really behind the Middle East conflict —something that does not sit well with those in power! Behind religious justifications, there are always capitalist interests at play. The two peoples have much more in common than divides them!

A very good portrayal revealing the apparent and real lines of conflict.

The comments above are just a small selection of the comments and likes for Ciervo’s video and make clear the extent of the opposition, including amongst Jews, to the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

The concerted campaign to close the Potsdam exhibition and suppress criticism of the Israeli government’s ongoing genocide against the Palestinians must be fought. We call on our readers to write letters of support for the exhibition and send them to the museum via email: info@fluxusplus.de. Please send copies to the German WSWWS editorial board sgp@gleichheit.de.



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